

Executive Summary

Research Objectives

This report presents the findings and recommendations from a 1996 statewide study of the adult education needs of limited English-proficient (LEP) adults in California conducted for the California Department of Education. Adult education instruction provided to LEP adults accounts for more than \$175 million of state and federal expenditures each year. Thus, the research was designed to provide a sound basis for planning and policy initiatives to assure LEP adults' equitable access to quality adult education services and to increase the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of those services.

The study explores three broad areas of shared concern among policymakers, planners, program administrators, adult education practitioners, and legislators. They are the following:

Patterns of Need The first research area consists of quantitative estimates of the extent of service need among LEP adults and county-by-county variations in the number, and linguistic composition of California's LEP population. This analysis yields critical data which provide a foundation for systematic allocation of adult education funding resources and for guiding local program planning to configure services to respond to the extraordinary diversity of California's LEP population.

Learning Needs and Objectives The second, and most critical, research objective was to better understand LEP adults' learning needs so as to improve service quality and cost-effectiveness. If LEP adult learners could be served better and faster, even with constraints on system capacity, it would be possible to respond to more of those in need. As legislative and public demand for solid data on the impacts of social program investments increases, improved data on skills development needs, methods for assessing those needs, and strategies for meaningfully assessing service outcomes will become critical.

System Responsiveness The final research area addressed in this study relates to the adequacy of the California adult education system's current response to LEP adults' needs. A full-scale evaluation was, however, well beyond the mandate and scope of this study. Thus, the study provides preliminary findings, focused primarily on issues of customer satisfaction and service access. The study presents a comprehensive set of recommendations to increase the versatility, service quality, and cost-effectiveness of the adult education system.

Methodology

The study requirements were for research be completed and reported to the California Department of Education by December, 1996. To accomplish this, Aguirre International adopted a research design which combined analysis of statewide extant data with field research in three communities chosen to represent, within the constraints of study budget and schedule, the geographical diversity of California.

The case study areas where field research took place are: Long Beach (chosen to represent urban areas of Southern California with large numbers of immigrants), Redwood City (San Francisco Bay Area), and Sanger/Fresno (rural Central California). In these areas, the study team conducted household surveys of limited English-proficient Latinos, and focus groups with potential and current adult education clients from major language groups -- in Long Beach, Cambodians and Latinos, in Sanger/Fresno, Hmong and Latinos, and, in Redwood City, Latinos.

Based on our review of the literature, extant data, and field research in case study communities, the study team presents 22 specific action recommendations in four separate areas of effort:

- Improved resource mobilization and rational allocation of resources
- Realignment of program mission and guidelines to increase responsiveness and accountability
- Continued efforts in staff and organizational development
- Applied research, planning, and collaborative service delivery initiatives

Findings and Recommendations

Here we report the major findings and specific recommendations from the current study.

Extent of Service Need and Distribution of California's LEP Population

A fundamental requirement for systematic program planning and policy analysis relates to the "universe of need" for services and the patterns of service demand within a state as large and diverse as California. **Chapter 1** of the current study examines the size, overall characteristics, and distribution of California's LEP population, using extant data sources. This analysis provides the basis for recommendations regarding resource mobilization, service planning, and systematic allocation of resources to respond equitably to LEP adults' needs.

The “core” population of LEP adults in need of adult education services numbers about 2.7 million.

The “core” LEP service population consists of persons whose English is limited and who have less than a high school diploma or less than 12 years of schooling in their country of origin. This estimate provides the most conservative measure of the “universe of need” for adult education services. This core numbered approximately 2.7 million persons as of January 1, 1997. At the turn of the century, this “universe of need” will have increased to approximately 3.2 million persons.

State Adult Literacy Survey (SALS) data show that large numbers of persons with 12 or more years of schooling experience functional literacy problems and that the size of the LEP population who might need “targeted” skills improvement is even larger than that of the “core” service population. In 1990 when the survey took place, about 2.2 million California adults were limited in understanding English; 2.4 million had substantial difficulties in speaking English, 2.8 million in reading English, and 3.6 million in writing in English. Thus, the full extent of adult learning needs among LEP adults may be as much as 65% larger than the “core” population.

LEP adults make up about two-fifths of the total population of California adults whose functional literacy is at a level where skills development would be needed to allow them to cope easily with the everyday literacy demands they face. Their service needs include not only the need to learn English but also basic skills improvement needs.

As many as 2 million LEP adults may need specialized assistance from the adult education system in order to secure citizenship.

Between 1.8 million and 2.2 million of California’s legal immigrants are LEP adults who have not yet been naturalized and who may need adult education services to help them fulfill the English-language or citizenship knowledge requirements of naturalization. Actual demand for ESL/citizenship services will, of course, depend on the proportion of eligible legal immigrants who decide to seek citizenship. A sub-group with particularly urgent need for adult education services are naturalization applicants whose citizenship is held up because they could not satisfy the English-language requirements of an INS examiner. Another 780,000 legal immigrants who become eligible to apply for citizenship over the four-year period from 1997-2000 may need ESL/citizenship assistance in the future.

Standard classroom instruction strategies are not well-suited to the specific needs of some sub-groups of naturalization applicants in need of assistance, particularly those who are elderly or those who have little or no schooling and minimal contact with English-speaking Californians.

The “core” service population of LEP adults is not distributed evenly throughout California.

Approximately half of the LEP core service population (49%) resides in Los Angeles County. Another 17% reside in contiguous areas of urban Southern California -- San Bernardino, Orange, and San Diego Counties. Another 13% reside in the urban San Francisco Bay area -- Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, San Mateo, and San Francisco counties. The remaining one-fifth of the LEP population is concentrated primarily in rural and ex-urban areas with high levels of agricultural production.

California’s farmworkers are an important sub-population of LEP adults. Although the overwhelming majority of the LEP core service population is urban, the highest concentrations of LEP adults (i.e., as % of potential adult education clients) are to be found in rural counties. Major rural counties for LEP services include: Fresno, Tulare, Madera, Monterey, and Imperial.

Detailed county-by-county mapping of the density gradients of LEP adults can be found in **Chapter 1** of the full report.

The distribution of California’s LEP population is shifting as immigrants diffuse from established immigrant-receiving areas into new parts of the state.

Using the California Department of Education’s data on the home language of children enrolled in the K-12 system, the study examined the changing distribution of LEP adults in the state from 1990 through 1995.¹ Several regions which have, in the past, had relatively few LEP adults now face especially rapid increases in the numbers of LEP adults. The rate of increase in LEP population in these “new” immigrant areas of the state is an important planning consideration because it is in these areas where the current service delivery system may most need to be expanded or re-configured to meet growing service demand.

Urban counties with particularly high annual rates of LEP service population growth include San Bernardino (6.3%) and Sacramento (6.7%). The rural counties with the highest rates of growth are those of the northern Sacramento Valley--Sutter, Colusa, Yuba, Butte--all of which have annual growth rates over 6%. Two counties of mixed rural-urban character -- Marin (8.3%) and Placer (9.2%) -- have the highest LEP growth rates in the state, probably due to extensive local reliance on an immigrant labor force. County-by-county estimates of LEP growth are detailed in Chapter 1 of the full report.

¹ The 1990 decennial census provides baseline population data for virtually all planning, e.g. Department of Finance projections and projections by individual agencies. The Home Language Survey provides an imperfect but unique source of data for tracking shifts in the distribution LEP population. 1995 is the last year for which these data have been tabulated.

Spanish is the primary language of more than four-fifths of the LEP “core” service population.

The overwhelming majority of California’s LEP “core” service population are Spanish-speakers. This suggests that service efficacy will be improved if local adult education programs in predominantly Latino communities develop specialized instructional designs which are responsive to the characteristic needs of Latinos rather than relying on a “one size fits all” service model.

Speakers of Chinese (aggregating all dialects) are the second largest language group, making up 6% of the population, followed by Vietnamese speakers who make up 2% of the population. No other single language group makes up more than 1% of the LEP population. In areas where there are dense concentrations of language minorities, e.g. Cambodians in Long Beach, Vietnamese in San Jose, Hmong in Fresno, Chinese in San Francisco, Alameda, and the San Bernardino counties, the development of specialized program designs and instructional services is also feasible and desirable.

The low numbers of LEP adults speaking languages other than Spanish in many areas of the state mean that it will be difficult for programs to customize their services to meet the needs of these language minorities. However, use of individualized tutoring, dissemination of audio instructional materials, and support for computer-based self-directed learning may be promising strategies for responding to diversity in these areas.

Study Implications for Resource Mobilization and Allocation

The data and analytic techniques now available to policymakers and program planners make it possible to develop reliable measures of the need for adult education services on a county-by-county basis. This data framework can be enhanced by systematic planning at the local level, using a variety of applied research techniques to guide local efforts to configure the menu of available services to respond more effectively to the needs of the adult education service population. The traditional model of informal course planning based on adult school administrators’ knowledge of their communities cannot substitute for systematic exploration of the nature of service demand.

California should seek to rationalize its allocation of funding for adult education services.

The most important implication of the analysis of the distribution of the LEP “core” service population in California is that there is a critical need to rationalize and realign state apportionment funding for adult education. Currently, there is virtually no relationship between the funding allocation for a given area and the universe of need for services -- for LEP adults or

any population of adult education clients. Rational allocation of resources is needed to assure that available resources are used efficiently and effectively. Where resources exceed service demand, there are few incentives to use available resources efficiently. Where demand vastly outstrips available resources, service quality inevitably suffers as providers struggle constantly to do more for less.

Adult education funding mechanisms should be developed to present greater incentives for service delivery system improvement and to encourage service provider responsiveness to emerging skills development needs.

Adult education programs are called upon to respond to a wide range of needs, particularly in serving LEP adults. Systematic analysis of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of California's LEP population can provide a solid empirical foundation for crafting targeted funding initiatives which provide special incentives to encourage service providers to respond to emerging needs such as ESL/citizenship instruction and the challenges of welfare reform.

This type of targeted incentive-oriented funding must be tied to provider performance as measured by learner outcomes. The bottom line for naturalization applicants, for example, is whether an INS examiner deems them to have a basic command day-to-day English, not a certificate of hours of "seat time." The bottom line for welfare recipients reaching the end of time-limited support is whether they, in fact, have the basic skills to succeed in vocational training or secure stable employment.

Although the demand for adult education services greatly exceeds system capacity throughout California, the study encountered little evidence that local adult schools were moving proactively to secure additional resources to support increases in service capacity or quality. Potential sources of support include local businesses, other programs which might have a stake in the outcomes from adult education programs, or volunteers who simply seek to help others in their community. The optimal strategy for leveraging resources is to reward service providers who "go the extra mile" to leverage new resources rather than to institute a mandatory matching requirement because some communities, particularly in rural areas, do not have the economic base to secure matching funds.

Use of ADA as the basis for funding adult education services must be re-examined in order to provide incentives for re-engineering the service delivery system to better respond to the needs of LEP adults and increase system cost-effectiveness.

The current funding system serves to discourage adoption of instructional methodologies other than classroom instruction. This, in turn, severely constrains the adult education system's ability to increase service quality and adopt the mix of instructional modalities and services needed to support lifelong learning. Alternative approaches to funding provision of adult

education services are a critical element in building a service delivery system which is more flexible, which responds more effectively to individual learners' needs, and which is committed to "world-class" service quality. Without additional flexibility and an expanded menu of services to offer to LEP adults, efforts to achieve increase service effectiveness will be seriously hampered.

A systematic and phased shift to performance-based accountability will, eventually, require attention to funding incentives and disincentives in any case. Therefore, the ideal course for the legislature and the California Department of Education would be to be proactive and initiate the strategic planning efforts needed to accomplish such a major shift in the legislative and regulatory framework for provision of adult education services.

Demand for Adult Education Services

The optimal deployment of resources is to invest in developing only the service capacity needed to meet demand. Developing "just enough" system capacity to meet demand makes it possible to devote more resources to investing in service quality improvement. Therefore, the current study explored the extent to which LEP adults who clearly needed adult education services would, in fact, seek those services. This provides a basis for ballpark estimates of what actual "market demand" for services might be.

Approximately one-third of California's LEP population is firmly interested in seeking adult education services in the foreseeable future.

One-third (33%) of Spanish-speaking household survey respondents said that they planned to pursue some sort of adult learning objective in the next year, or in the next 2-3 years. Focus group discussions suggest that a similar proportion of LEP adults from other language groups are actively interested in enrolling in an adult learning program.

The overwhelming majority of the remaining LEP adults "don't know for sure" whether they would like to enroll in an adult learning program. The plans of this large group of "uncertain" potential adult education students may change as their life circumstances change (e.g. when child care responsibilities are less, when seeking a new job). Predictably, the leading barriers to enrollment were work and child care responsibilities. Transportation was not generally considered to be a problem. Demand among these "uncertain" potential students is likely to be relatively elastic and respond to "customer" perceptions about quality of service as well as changes in personal circumstances.

An important related finding is that demand for services varies greatly from community to community. In Sanger, for example, almost half (47%) of respondents to the study's Spanish-speaking Household Survey (SSHS) had plans to engage in adult learning while only one-quarter of the Redwood City (23%) and Long Beach (27%) respondents were interested.

These community-to-community variations in potential demand for adult education services reflect not only differences in the profile of the LEP population in each community but, also, labor market factors. This serves to highlight the need for system flexibility and careful local planning to respond to local needs.

LEP adults are generally aware of adult school programs in their community and consider adult schools accessible. The most important constraint on service access stems from potential students' concerns about the types and quality of learning opportunities available.

California's adult schools are physically accessible to LEP adults and at least one school among those in our case study communities, Long Beach Adult School, had been creative and proactive in designing innovative service delivery arrangements to facilitate LEP adults' access.

About three-quarters (73%) of Spanish-speaking household survey respondents, and even greater proportions of Hmong and Cambodian focus group were aware of a local adult school. However, many did not know much about adult schools. For example, almost nine out of ten respondents (88%) knew about the local adult school's ESL program, but less than half (45%) knew about the availability of citizenship classes. Most, but not all, Spanish-speaking LEP adults we surveyed who had, at some point, enrolled in an adult school program were very happy with their experience. Cambodian and Latino focus group participants had similar experiences; however, Hmong focus group participants were generally displeased with their adult school experience.

Focus group discussions with Latino, Hmong, and Cambodian adult education students and non-students showed substantial disagreement within each group about the quality of service provided by adult schools. Because, the primary way in which LEP adults hear of adult schools is via word of mouth from relatives and friends, "customer" satisfaction can be expected to play an important role in potential students' decisions to enroll in an adult learning program or not. While adult education services are free, the low-income adults who make up the overwhelming majority of the LEP service population incur substantial opportunity costs if they take time from work, looking for work, or child care to attend an adult school program.

Strategies to Broaden Learning Options

The study explored the feasibility of alternatives to classroom instruction as a way to facilitate LEP adults' access to service, broaden learning options, and to support lifelong self-directed learning. The study also explored alternatives to the typical adult school schedule of 2-3 evening classes per week. These options deserve careful attention as elements in a strategy to increase service effectiveness and accessibility.

The key principle is that efforts to increase service access and improve service quality need to give greater attention to the full continuum of potential learning modalities and focus on developing a system which allow multiple modes for participating in adult learning programs. Increasing the diversity of available adult learning modalities is a crucial element in developing an adult education system to support lifelong learning. Options are discussed in detail in **Chapter 3** of the full report.

No single instructional design is likely to meet the needs of all LEP adult learners

The traditional schedule of 2-3 evening classes per week is popular but at least two alternative scheduling options -- intensive 2-day weekend classes and a model combining 1 day/week of peer-group study with instructor consultation on a flexible schedule-- were considered attractive by at least half the Spanish-speaking survey respondents. A similar proportion of the LEP population consider study circles and volunteer-based learning programs to be appealing options. Women with children were particularly interested in instructional designs which would allow them to learn English in informal settings (e.g. in conjunction with Head Start).

This highlights the utility of supplementing the traditional classroom “evening school” service delivery system with a more flexible menu of learning modalities, including alternative class scheduling patterns, peer-based “study circles”, volunteer-based learning programs, and distance learning. Because the attractiveness of each option is likely to vary greatly among different LEP sub-groups, local “market research” via focus groups has the potential of providing crucial information to program planners for the purpose of re-configuring the local service delivery system to best respond to local needs.

Increasing the menu of adult learning options is a critical element in efforts to develop a service delivery system which will support lifelong learning and achieve increased cost-effectiveness.

Some distance-learning strategies have promise but LEP adults are much more interested in access to video cassette, audio cassette, and computer-based instruction than broadcast television or radio.

Broadcast-based distance learning has little appeal to LEP adults. The reality is that, in crowded households with large families, neither radio nor television are considered an appropriate learning medium. The most popular instructional modality is video cassette; more than three-quarters (77%) of Spanish-speaking LEP adults said they would definitely borrow such materials if they were made available. More than half (55%) said they would definitely borrow audiocassette-based materials. Almost two-thirds (63%) said they thought computer-based instructional programs were a good way to learn. In discussing places where computer-

based learning materials could be located to facilitate access, the most popular option was libraries, followed by elementary schools and high schools.

The Full Spectrum of LEP Adults' Learning Needs

The study conducted a comprehensive examination of LEP adults' learning needs. This research is reported in **Chapters 3 and 4** of the full report. The field survey research asked respondents to rate their ability to respond to the demands they faced in everyday life -- in the workplace, in family interactions, as part of participating in community life, and in the course of their efforts to develop new skills and learn new information. The findings from this research indicate that it will be crucial for adult education to reconsider its mission so as to better align services to respond to the real-world skills demands placed on LEP adults.

One of the most important overall themes to emerge from the in-depth examination of LEP adults' learning needs is that their primary need is not for "survival" English but, rather, for comprehensive educational services designed to build their mobility in California society. Although many of the LEP adults contacted in the study (in both the survey of Spanish-speaking households and Cambodian, Hmong, and Latino focus groups) said they were able to function well in the current environment in which they lived, very few felt they would be able to function effectively in the English-language environment of mainstream California society. Learning English is an important priority but, for many, the idea of "learning English" is really a metaphor for an across-the-board drive to achieve facility in a wide range of social and economic interactions.

Because adult learning needs of California's LEP adults do not hinge on day-to-day survival but, rather, on achieving social, economic, and political equity, adult education must recognize that the challenge it confronts is not simply to "remediate" easily recognized and described basic skills deficiencies. Instead, the adult education system must provide a solid foundation for integrating limited-English adults, both foreign-born and native-born, into the mainstream of California society.

"Illiteracy" can no longer be treated as a form of relatively uncommon social pathology experienced only by "marginal" populations but, rather, as a common and inevitable consequence of the cultural and linguistic diversity of California's population and the rapidly-escalating volume and complexity of information which confronts Californians. The current system of adult education which was designed to confront a monolithic problem of "illiteracy" must be reconfigured to respond to the demands of a multilingual, multicultural, information-based 21st century society. Failure to respond to this challenge will serve to perpetuate the existence of a segmented labor market, a social and educational environment in which families experience lifelong disadvantages due to limitations on their ability to acquire and analyze crucial information, and communities fragmented along ethnic, linguistic, and educational "fault lines."

LEP Adults' Learning Needs in Different Domains of Daily Life

Many LEP adults report some facility in dealing with the demands of daily life in the communities where they live, most of which are immigrant enclaves. However, while many can “get by” in the immigrant enclave in which they live, few feel they have the skills they need to get ahead or to deal with the more challenging aspects of life in California. Less than one in ten feel confident that they can function adequately in an English-only environment. Lack of English-language skills was considered particularly serious as a constraint on participating in community affairs. Building communication skills in English and basic skills for acquiring, analyzing, interpreting, and making informed decisions are a pressing long-term need.

Workplace Skills -- While most LEP adults (66%) feel they have the skills they need to do the work they are now doing, their current skills do not permit them upward career mobility or the ability to move into a new occupational area. Even in their current work environment -- usually a low-wage “low skill” occupation -- more than half (53%) have some problems in communicating with their supervisor or employer

Family Life -- In their current situation, only half of LEP adults feel confident that they can deal well with the demands placed on them as part of family life in a complex society such as: money management, giving advice to family members on the issues they confront, communicating with their children's teachers, neighbors, and storekeepers. Getting help to deal with health, housing, or similar issues is a particular problem area with two-fifths of survey respondents saying they cannot deal “very well” or “at all” with getting help.

Community Life -- Very few LEP adults feel empowered to participate fully in California community life. Only one-third (34%) feel they are able to join with friends and neighbors to have a say about how organizations respond to their needs. Only one quarter (25%) feel they are prepared to understand the community issues they hear about, see in the newspaper or vote on. An equally small proportion (26%) feel confident they can communicate their opinion to local, state, or federal representatives. In an English-only environment, less than 5% feel able to participate meaningfully in community life.

Lifelong Learning -- Only half of the LEP adults we interviewed felt they were adequately prepared to participate and succeed in a program to learn a new trade or occupation, to use magazines, manual, or books to find out the information they needed in daily life, or to make informed choices about their careers, education, or “getting ahead.” Only one-quarter felt adequately prepared to use resources such as libraries or computer-based information systems to get the information they needed.

Varying Patterns of Skills Development Needs

The study's analysis of different immigrant cohorts' self-assessed functional skills sheds further light on the overall profile of LEP adults' needs. While the research literature shows that immigrants' English language facility increases with time in the United States, the LEP adults interviewed in the current study who had lived longest in the United States (20 years or more) do not feel any more confident of their ability to function effectively in any of the four domains of community life than recent arrivals (0-9 years in the U.S.). This suggests that linguistic and social isolation, combined with educational disadvantage, have "stalled" their ability to integrate themselves into California society. At the same time, their expectations and aspirations may have increased relative to the most recent immigrants.

Analyses of the patterns of need among key sub-groups within the LEP population -- men and women, those with little versus those with some prior post-elementary schooling-- show that the learning needs of these sub-groups are significantly different. One of the most important study findings is that low levels of schooling interact with English-language limitations to seriously constrain individuals' ability to function in different domains of everyday life, most notably in the workplace and in pursuing a course of lifelong learning. The study also suggests the need to focus on the special needs of women who have little schooling. Detailed findings on patterns of need among sub-groups are reported in **Chapter 4** of the study.

New perspectives on LEP Adults' Learning Needs -- Implications for Policy and Planning

The study findings about the types of learning needs experienced by LEP adults strongly suggest the need for instructional designs focused on comprehensive skills development and configured to catalyze and support lifelong learning through a mixture of participation in formal, structured programs, counseling, coaching, support for self-directed learning, and constant efforts to extend learning beyond the classroom. A crucial challenge is to support LEP learners in their efforts to practice, fine-tune, and mobilize the skills they have begun to acquire in a classroom or other formal learning environment.

A fundamental re-examination of the adult education mission, service delivery system, regulatory/administrative framework, and staff development strategies will be required to bring California's adult education system to a point where it can reliably respond to the needs of its "customers" -- adult learners, California business, and the general public. In this effort, top priority should be given to service quality improvement. In confronting this task, adult education stakeholders should recognize that the issue of quality service to limited English-proficient adults is central to its mission since LEP adults make up almost half of the entire "universe of need" for basic adult education services and requires a proportional amount of system resources -- more than \$175 million per year.

The study presents a comprehensive set of recommendations for legislative, administrative, planning and staff development initiatives which would prepare California adult education to better respond to the learning needs of LEP adults. Key recommendations are summarized below.

California should re-examine the framework of 10 legislatively-authorized instructional areas and establish a “comprehensive basic skills” designation for programs designed to develop “high performance” skills in multiple areas. This initiative to support “teaching across the curriculum” should include guidelines, targeted and refocused staff development efforts, and increasing emphasis on outcome-based assessment of program performance.

The current framework of ten legislatively-authorized areas does not correspond well to the real-world learning needs of LEP adults. In particular, the distinctions between “elementary” skills, “secondary” skills, “ESL”, and “GED” are anachronistic and serve to encourage a “cookie-cutter” approach to curriculum content and course design. Study survey findings and focus group discussions strongly indicate that “customer” demand is for comprehensive instructional designs oriented toward real-world skills demands; these findings highlight the urgency of efforts sparked by the ground-breaking work of the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills (SCANS) to articulate a framework for building “high performance” skills.

While the adult education field has, with some justification, felt that legislators and policymakers did not appreciate their accomplishments, there is not yet a clear vision of what a “world-class” adult education system would be or support for meaningful service quality standards. While there is some innovation at the local level, priority has usually been to “do more with less money”, not to develop and assure instructional effectiveness. Few of the efforts which do emerge are sustained or systematically evaluated.

Current “model program standards” provide only very weak guidance for efforts to increase instructional quality. The analytic systems currently used to assess incoming LEP adults’ “baseline” skills and post-program skills are not adequate to encourage instructional designs which are firmly focused on teaching to support acquisition of the “high performance” social and communication skills all Californians need. Additionally, staff development efforts are not adequately funded or configured to assure that LEP students will have statewide access to consistently high-quality service which will make a difference in their lives.

Legislative and administrative action will be required to address this complex set of issues. However, the first task in carrying out such an initiative will be for, administrators, adult school instructors and staff to conscientiously examine California adult education’s vision of its own mission. Ideally this effort should be a broad-based and open process including not only

those within the adult school system itself but, also, with a major stake in service outcomes: legislators, California businesses, community organizations, immigrant advocates and human service providers working with the same population, and adult learners themselves.

The challenge is to decide whether adult education services to LEP adults will continue to be predicated on efforts to do as well as possible with inadequate resources or whether there will be a commitment to achieving consistent, “world-class” outcomes. Once there is consensus on a clear and well-articulated vision, coordinated funding, administrative, and staff development efforts can be solidly justified as an affordable, and essential, investment in California’s human capital.

California must reconfigure the adult education service delivery system to support sustained and even “lifelong” adult learning. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to facilitate adult learners movement through “the system” -- beginning with formulation of individualized learning plans, orientation sessions on “learning to learn”, and post-program support for self-directed learning.

LEP adults move in and out of the California adult education system so rapidly that it is not clear that this transitory contact with an adult learning program has a significant impact on their lives. There has been virtually no systematic attention to effective ways to move adult learners, into, through, or out of classroom instruction, although course non-completion rates are known to be extremely high.

The traditional commitment to “open entry-open exit” instruction coupled with a laissez-faire “first-come, first-served” access to service creates the mistaken impression that basic skills development is akin to browsing in a library. This ultimately undermines the critical recognition that adult learning is a challenging, time-consuming, and demanding task for adults with little prior experience and success with schooling. Success requires that students and instructional staff alike must work systematically and deliberately toward achieving results. It is crucial to recognize the very substantial “basic skills gap” faced by limited-English adult learners, most of whom are foreign-born and less than half of whom have an elementary school level of schooling, cannot be overcome otherwise.

As currently configured, California’s adult education system does serve to provide most LEP adults a “jump start” in building the communication skills, analytic abilities, and knowledge base they will need to live in California. This is a valuable accomplishment but it is sharply at odds with the “official story” that a 13 week course, or even a series of courses, will enable a LEP adult to achieve specific educational objectives and guarantee specific competencies, e.g. the ability to speak English, the ability to successfully undertake a course of vocational training. While California classrooms provide LEP learners with the rewarding

experience of participating in a caring “learning community”, more deliberate and structured efforts to enhance, extend, and sustain ongoing skills development are needed.

A system designed to support lifelong learning must go beyond “the course” as the basic unit of operations and service management. A new service paradigm, oriented toward preparing LEP adults to discuss their learning needs and aspirations with instructional staff, establish an individualized learning plan, use time spent in the classroom setting effectively, and continue progressing toward achieving their individual objectives is long overdue. A new outcome-oriented service paradigm can dramatically increase service efficacy, once it is recognized that the proper role for adult education is not to “teach”, i.e., to provide everything each student needs, but, rather to “support learning”, i.e., effectively assist adult learners in building the abilities they need not simply to survive but to prevail in the full range of social interactions they confront.

Implementation of a new service paradigm will require a fundamental reconfiguration of service delivery strategies, system staffing requirements, planning, and program evaluation techniques. The most obvious requirement is for adult schools to establish a counseling infrastructure, staff development resources, and new instructional delivery modes (e.g. distance learning options) to support lifelong learning. The role of the adult school or community-based service provider would, then, evolve beyond the current basic requirements of publishing a course schedule and providing instructors for listed courses. The focus would shift, instead, to the challenge of proactively managing and supporting adult learners’ learning progress -- in class and out of class, before entering a classroom and after leaving the classroom.

Legislative and administrative action will be needed to pursue such a service paradigm since current funding based on “class contact hours” does not provide an appropriate structure for funding a system which provides ongoing services such as counseling, distance learning, and individual tutoring. Meaningful action would require moderate funding increases but, at the same time, such funding would greatly increase the overall cost- effectiveness of adult education.

While the vision of a reengineered adult education service delivery system designed to support lifelong learning may appear daunting, it should be observed that a similar “reinvention” of the health care service delivery system has deeply changed the entire society’s view of what constitutes “health care” extending care beyond the office visit to become a broad-spectrum set of initiatives resting, in part, on individual responsibility, in part on provider commitment to go beyond the individual “service encounter”. Such a redesigned system, while needed by most adult learners, is particularly valuable for LEP adults for whom the education/language skills gap is so large.

California's adult education system should extend the range of learning modalities available to learners. A broad spectrum of learning options promises to improve service responsiveness and increase the cost-effectiveness of service delivery, and support lifelong learning efforts.

There is no empirical evidence that LEP adults' learning needs are best addressed in packages of 100 hours of instruction (the amount of classroom time in a typical course). Redesigning the service delivery system to provide a wider menu of learning options can greatly increase cost-effectiveness by using instructional staff more effectively while, at the same time, increasing responsiveness to adult learners' needs

For example, weekend orientation courses on "learning to learn" might valuably prepare many motivated LEP adults to pursue a self-directed course of study without taking up valuable classroom space. Initial counseling and dialogue in developing an individualized learning plan might greatly increase service effectiveness by preparing a very limited English-proficient adult with almost no schooling to plan a multi-year learning agenda combining classroom attendance, tutoring, and self-directed study. Post-program assessment and counseling might help students who have done well in class without achieving their personal objectives plan what to do next to meet their needs. Tutoring and individualized support, in conjunction with classroom instruction, might help the very large proportion of LEP learners who now drop out of an adult education class to succeed in their learning endeavors.

Without a broad menu of service options, the adult education system and LEP adults alike are "set up" to fail in achieving meaningful outcomes.

Conclusions

We conclude that a fundamental re-examination of how the adult education system construes and responds to the basic skills development needs of those it serves holds out the promise of greatly improving services to LEP adults and, in fact, other adult learners.

California's LEP adults' needs do not hinge upon acquiring traditional certificates of competency such as the GED or documenting hours of seat time in an ESL classroom but, rather, toward building their ability to analyze and communicate effectively in an information-rich, interactive social environment. The intellectual agility, self-confidence, and awareness of effective strategies to pursue ongoing, lifelong learning is not a luxury but a necessity in an increasingly complex society. The adult education system, if it is to fulfill its traditional commitment to preparing LEP adults for full participation in the economy and society, must, like other segments of California's post-secondary education system, set high standards of excellence linked to the real-world demands learners face.

Need for adult education services, given the demographic and socioeconomic composition of California's population and the demands of a business environment linked to rapidly-growing demand for services and products in the Pacific Rim region will, inevitably outstrip available program resources. Nonetheless, modest and affordable investments of resources targeted toward increasing service effectiveness and responsiveness will yield tremendous returns for California's limited English-proficient population, their employers, and the communities in which they live.

Re-engineering the current service delivery design to transcend a conceptual model which "reduces" the skills development process to a finite set of simple, curriculum building blocks is essential. It is also feasible; perspectives from contemporary research in cross-cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, language acquisition, literacy development, and cognitive psychology provide a sound theoretical basis for systematic innovation.

One of the most important implications of this study is that the current move toward adoption of a uniform and challenging framework of standards for educational excellence cannot, by itself, be a solution. The problem relates not simply to the need for standards, appropriate strategies for measuring student achievement, and for assuring performance-based accountability among service providers. Adoption of "world-class" standards for California adult education must be matched with a commitment to re-thinking what adult learning needs are within the 21st century environment and how best to respond to them. Such redesign efforts will, inevitably, need to refine the paradigm of adult education services to rely less on classroom-based models of "stand and deliver" teaching and explore new and innovative strategies. The basic challenge will be to craft program designs which can ignite and sustain educationally-disadvantaged adults' ability to get started learning and keep on learning as part of the texture of their daily lives.

Anything less will serve to perpetuate the existence of a dual-track educational service delivery system which fails to satisfy the needs of its stakeholders -- LEP adults, their employers, and the communities in which they live. A prudent response to the challenge of developing an adult education service delivery system which genuinely responds to the needs of LEP and other educationally-disadvantaged adults will require flexibility, risk-taking, and a solid commitment to collaboration from different groups of key players: the legislature, the California Department of Education, adult school administrators, and instructional staff. Increased program funding resources will be needed, but it cannot be assured that they will be used effectively unless there is a concomitant commitment to allocate resources in a systematic and deliberate fashion (not on the current arbitrary baselines established and only slightly modified since the 1970's) and to guarantee taxpayers and adult education learners meaningful service outcomes.